

IN TOO DEEP



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CHAPTER 1

The sound of rushing water filled Amy Cahill's ears. If she kept her eyes closed, she could imagine she was standing under a beautiful tropical waterfall. Unfortunately, she was hiding in an airport bathroom.

Inside a stall, she tucked up her legs and balanced her backpack on her knees. Toilets flushed, faucets ran, and suitcases on wheels trailed feet in a big hurry. The airport in Sydney, Australia, was a busy place.

Busy was good. Busy was cover. If you wanted to ditch surveillance, a bathroom could offer you a perfect opportunity. If you didn't mind crouching on a toilet for fifteen minutes.

Ditch surveillance. Only weeks ago, that would have meant not letting her little brother, Dan, read her diary. Now it was all too real. *Too real* for a fourteen-year-old.

Amy peeked over the stall. A tour group of teenagers had entered the bathroom a few moments ago, and now they chattered in French as they washed their

hands and primped at the mirror. The guide cried, “*Allons-y!*” Still talking and laughing, they began to wheel their suitcases toward the exit.

It was a perfect opportunity. Amy slipped out of the stall. Smiling at a pretty French girl, she melted into the group. Women streamed in and out of the doors, and the tour group got entangled with an Australian woman with four daughters. Amy slid into the middle of the crowd as they exited.

She kept the tour group between her and the gate opposite. As soon as they headed off toward baggage claim, she ducked into a coffee bar. She scanned the corridor, searching out anyone familiar . . . or a suspicious stranger.

Everything looked normal. The only problem was that normal wasn’t necessarily good. Because the *new* normal meant anyone at all could be a threat.

How about that Japanese family in super-cool footwear? The backpacking American boy and girl in matching SMELL U T-shirts? The middle-aged woman munching a muffin, the mother with a stroller, the man stopping to dial his cell phone.

Any one of them could be after her and her brother, Dan. Any one of them could be *Cahills*. Amy had never dreamed that her own last name would send such a chill down her spine.

Ever since her grandmother’s will had been read, she’d been chased from one continent to another . . . by her own relatives. Her grandmother Grace Cahill

had laid down a challenge to every branch of the Cahill family—either join the race for the 39 Clues and become the most powerful person in the world . . . or walk away with a million dollars. Amy and Dan had chosen the chase. Not that a million dollars wouldn't be pretty sweet. But they knew their grandmother wanted them to win.

They had no idea what they were getting into.

Sometimes Amy wondered what the scariest thing about being involved with the hunt for the Clues was. Maybe it wasn't being buried alive or almost creamed by a train or locked in a mummy's tomb. All those things had actually happened to her . . . and she'd survived. Maybe it was this—having to be suspicious of every single person on the planet. Amy and Dan had learned the hard way that any one of them could be an informer.

Would the rest of her life be like this? Looking over her shoulder all the time? *Don't wig out on me now*, Dan would say. He was three years younger, but sometimes she needed him for a reality check. Amy hurried on.

They were supposed to meet at ground transportation. As soon as their plane from Moscow had touched down, Amy, Dan, and their au pair, Nellie Gomez, split up. Instead of rushing for a taxi, they would wander the airport and give any possible pursuers the slip.

They had come to Sydney on a hunch. Back in Russia, they'd discovered that their parents had

traveled under false names on Australian passports. As Amy walked down the busy corridor, she thought of the photo of her parents the Lucian Nataliya had sent them. She and Dan traded it back and forth because they both wanted to sneak looks at it. Since their parents had died in a fire at their family home, all the photographs of them had been destroyed. All except one, and Dan had lost that back in Paris.

Ever since she'd seen that photo, little pieces of memory kept drifting back to her. Suddenly, she remembered silly things, like how they'd had "breakfast for dinner" on Thursday nights, or how her mother had always carried different colored markers in her purse so they could draw on place mats if they went somewhere to eat. How one day they'd made jewels out of aluminum foil . . . and wore their crowns to the grocery store. She'd almost forgotten what a goofball her mother had been.

Her parents had been in this airport more than eight years ago. They'd walked these corridors. *Mom, Dad . . . what were you doing here?*

She and Dan could be off on a tangent. This trip might not lead to a Clue. They had no evidence that it would. But they had both known the moment they saw those passports where they were headed next. They didn't even have to exchange a word.

Their only contact in Australia was a cousin of their father's, Shepard Trent. He'd grown up with their father, so they'd always called him "uncle." They knew

he lived in Sydney. There was no way their parents would have traveled here without seeing him. Uncle Shep would be their first stop.

The only problem was, they still hadn't been able to get in touch with him. His phone had been cut off. Nellie had managed to grab an address off the Internet, but they had no idea if it was current.

Amy headed for the rendezvous point. They had already decided that public transportation would be better than a taxi. If they kept a low profile, they should be able to hide in the crowds of tourists.

"Throw a roo on the barbie, mate!"

Amy winced as the bad Australian accent crashed against her ears. Then she cringed as she saw Dan dressed in an Australian bush hat and a safari jacket. He had a fake rubber snake wrapped around his neck.

"You call this is a low profile?" she hissed, swiping the hat off his head and stuffing it in the side pocket of her pack.

"What was I supposed to do in the airport shop?" Dan asked. "I had to buy *something*. Did you know that Australia has more deadly creatures than anywhere else in the world? Look at this snake—it's called a taipan. Its venom can kill, like, two thousand sheep. Or maybe it was two hundred. Anyway, if you get bit by one of these babies, you have to, like, get airlifted to a hospital for antivenom or else die a horrifying death right there." To demonstrate, Dan clutched the snake

and began to emit choking noises, bug out his eyes, and hold his breath. “Arrggghhhh,” he yelled.

“Here you are, right on time. It’s a miracle.” Nellie walked up. She completely ignored Dan’s popping eyes, red face, and strangle noises. “I like this place already, don’t you? I just had the *best* lamington,” she said, licking chocolate off her fingers. “Beats a donut any day.”

On their last night in Moscow, Nellie had trimmed her hair with nail scissors. Now tufts of her jet-black-and-platinum-streaked hair stuck out from her head like exclamation points. She ran her fingers through it, making it stick up more than ever.

Dan fell on the floor, one leg twitching. “I bought some postcards,” Nellie continued, stepping over Dan to show Amy. “Australia is gorgeous. I wonder if we have time to hit the beach.”

Dan popped up. “The blue-ringed octopus!” he cried. “*Instant death!*”

“There’s a bus that takes us into central Sydney,” Nellie said, unfolding a map. “Then we can transfer to another to get to your cousin’s place. I think that’s our best bet. I mapped out the route.”

“Great,” Amy said.

“Even a platypus can kill you if you’re not careful,” Dan added. “This place is awesome.”

They walked out into the bright Australian sunshine and joined the line for the bus. After the gray clouds of Russia, they were cheered by the soft breeze and blue skies.

Nellie held the cat carrier up to her face and purred at Saladin. “G’day, mate,” she said in an Australian accent. “You’ll be eating snapper soon, I promise.”

In answer, Saladin let out a *mrrp* as the bus pulled up with a squeal of brakes. The cat-screech startled the elderly woman standing in front of them. She turned around. “What is that, dear? Some exotic Australian bird?” She peered at the cat carrier nearsightedly as she fished in her purse for a tissue.

“It’s just a cat,” Amy said apologetically. “He’s hungry, I guess.”

“Ooo, I love kitties.” She pulled her red suitcase on wheels as the line of tourists shuffled forward.

Amy spoke in a low tone to Dan. “I hope Uncle Shep is still at this address. I don’t know how to find him otherwise.”

“We can just hang out at surf shops,” Dan said. “We’ll find him eventually.”

Shep was a surfing bum. They’d met him when they were little, but Amy only had a hazy memory and Dan didn’t remember him at all. He hadn’t made it to their parents’ funeral seven years before. But one of Dan’s collections back in Boston was a stack of postcards Shep had sent them over the years, from places like Bali or Oahu. There was always a big wave on the front.

They boarded the bus and stowed their backpacks under their seats. The elderly woman with the red suitcase opened up her map behind them as the bus took off.

The map bounced off the back of Amy's head. "Oops, sorry dear," the woman said. "I just bopped you with the Blue Mountains."

"It's okay," Amy said. "No worries."

"Americans! I knew it! So friendly. I traveled to Kansas City once. Delicious barbecue. You're not from Kansas by any chance? No? Pity." The woman began to murmur to herself as she looked over the map. Every so often it would smack Amy on the head again, but she ignored it.

As the bus hit the city center, traffic swirled around them, and they rumbled from block to block. The change from Moscow was startling. Outside the people walked with brisk athletic strides, dressed in bright summery clothes, chatting and laughing with their companions. Everybody in Sydney seemed fit and happy.

"No wonder they call it Oz," Dan said. "This is unreal."

Nellie kept her eyes on the map and on their various stops. Amy peered at the signs.

"Doesn't Shep live near Darlinghurst?" Amy asked.

"Dude, don't call me darling," Dan said. "Ever. That's an absolute rule."

"Darlinghurst is an area of Sydney, you dork," Amy said.

"Dork, acceptable. Darling, un."

The friendly woman behind them stood up as they rolled to a stop. Dragging her suitcase and folding her

map, she waved at them. “Cheerio! Enjoy your trip!”

“You, too!” Amy waved. The doors hissed shut.

Nellie consulted the map again. “We’re near Circular Quay. Only a couple more stops before we transfer.”

Amy leaned over to look at the map. Something was different. A familiar weight was missing. . . .

“Grace’s necklace!” Amy felt weak as her hands flew up to her neck. “I lost it!”

“Are you sure?” Nellie asked, looking on the seat.

Amy couldn’t answer. There was a huge lump in her throat, and she fought back tears. The necklace wasn’t just a necklace. It was something that Grace had cherished. Every time Amy touched it, it brought back her grandmother’s bracing presence, and she felt a connection to Grace’s own courage.

The bus turned a corner as Amy frantically scrambled on the floor. “It’s not here!”

“When do you remember it last?” Nellie asked.

“When we were waiting for the bus,” Amy said, thinking hard. “I tucked it underneath my T-shirt.”

“It’s not missing,” Nellie said. “It was stolen. That old woman!”

“Really? She was so sweet. She kept hitting me in the head with the map and apologizing. . . .” Amy’s mouth dropped open.

Nellie nodded. “Yup. Distracting you.”

Dan began to stab at the STOP button on his armrest. “Come on. Let’s go kick some little-old-lady butt!”